

On Decision of Character.

preponderance, that his reluctant refusal of the offered crown was the voice of only half his soul.

Not only two distinct counteracting passions, but one passion interested for two objects, both equally desirable, but of which the one must be sacrificed, may annihilate in that instance the possibility of a resolute promptitude of conduct. I recollect reading in an old divine, a story from some historian, applicable to this remark. A father went to the agents of a tyrant, to endeavour to redeem his two sons, military men, who, with some other captives of war, were condemned to die. He offered, as a ransom, a sum of money, and to surrender his own life. The tyrant's agents who had them in charge, informed him that this equivalent would be accepted for one of his sons, and for one only, because they should be accountable for the execution of two persons ; he might therefore choose which he would redeem. Anxious to save even one of them thus at the expense of his own life, he yet was unable to decide which should die, by choosing the other to live, and remained in the agony of this dilemma so long that they were both irreversibly ordered for execution.

LETTER V.

IT were absurd to suppose that any human being can attain a state of mind capable of acting in all instances invariably with the full power of determination; but it is obvious that many have possessed an habitual and very commanding measure of it; and I think the preceding remarks have taken account of its chief characteristics and constituent principles. A number of additional observations remains.

The slightest view of human affairs shows what fatal and wide-spread mischief may be caused by men of this character, when misled or wicked. You have but to recollect the conquerors, despots, bigots, unjust conspirators, and signal villains of every class, who have blasted society by the relentless vigour which could act consistently and heroically wrong. Till therefore the virtue of mankind be greater, there is reason to be pleased that so few of them are endowed with extraordinary decision.

Even when dignified by wisdom and principle, this qualit*